

3.
A THIRD
DISCOURSE
ON THE
MIRACLES
OF OUR
SAVIOUR,

In VIEW of the Present
Controversy between INFIDELS
and APOSTATES.

*Litteratos gravissimo Somno stertere con-
vincam,* HIERON.

The Second Edition.

By THOMAS WOOLSTON, sometime
Fellow of *Sidney-College* in *Cambridge*.

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By Thomas Woolston, Minister
of the Gospel at St. Dunstons Church
in London.

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Printed by J. Knapton, at the Angel, and sold by him
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[1729]



TO THE

Right Reverend Father in God

RICHARD,

Lord Bishop of St. DAVID'S.

MY LORD,



N your Sermon before
the Societies for Re-
formation of Manners,
you are pleased to give
a Character of my
former Discourses on
Christ's Miracles; which, tho I
don't at all like, yet I thank you for the
Favour of taking Notice of them; a
Favour that I have long'd for from a
considerable Clergyman; but, could

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not flatter myself with the Hopes of receiving it from so great a Prelate.

Some of the inferior Clergy, whom I despise for their Ignorance and Malice, have before in their Conversation represented me as an impious and blasphemous Infidel; and I have met with Affronts for it: But I never imagin'd that any, much less your Lordship, would have ventur'd such a Character of me from the Press, for fear of a Resentment, which would not be agreeable. Surely your Lordship has not read my Discourses, but has taken a Report of them upon Trust, from some Ecclesiastical Noodle; or you could never have been so much mistaken about my Design in them.

I took myself to be a Christian of the same Faith with the Fathers of the Church; and, without Vanity, think, I have publish'd some Tracts, in Defence of Christianity, equal, if
not

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not superior to any Thing this Age has produced. I repeatedly also in my Discourses on Miracles, to obviate the Prejudices of an ignorant Clergy, made solemn Protestations of the Sincerity of my Design, not to do Service to Infidelity, but to make Way for the Demonstration of Jesus's Messiahship from Prophecy: But all these Asseverations of the Integrity of my Heart, it seems, stands for nothing (and I don't wonder at it) with the Clergy, who in their Principles, their Oaths, and Subscriptions are so accustomed to prevaricate with God and Man. I shall make no more serious Protestations of my Faith, but expect your Lordship should soon publish a Defence of your foul Charge against me, that I may see what Skill you have in the impious and blasphemous Writings of an Infidel.

And if your railing Accusation be not soon followed with a Dissertation
of

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of more Reason, I shall insist on a publick Reparation of the Injury done to my Reputation by your vile and slanderous Sermon; and appeal to the worshipful Societies for Reformation of Manners, whether it be not just and reasonable, you should do one or the other.

Now I have laid hold on your Lordship, than whom I could not have wish'd for an Adversary, that will do me more Honour to overcome, I will hold you fast; and you must expect to be teaz'd and insulted from the Press, if you enter not the Lists against me.

A clear Stage, my Lord, and no Favour. If you have the Sword of the Spirit in your Hand, cut as sharply as you can with it. I had conceiv'd a great Opinion of your Learning, and should have been a little apprehensive of the Power of it; if you had not in your Sermon betray'd as great Weakness and Ignorance,

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Ignorance, as could be in a poor Curat; or you had never asserted that the Greek Commentators adher'd more strictly to the literal Sense of the Holy Scriptures; as if you knew not, that St. Theophilus of Antioch, and even Origen himself and others, the greatest Allegorists, if a Comparison may be made, were Commentators of the Greek Church.

*The sooner your Lordship appears from the Press, the better, in as much as you may possibly prevent my Publication of more Discourses of this Kind. And that it may not be long first, I will accept of a Dissertation from you, on any two or three of the Miracles, I have handled, as sufficient for all. Take your Choice of them: but don't I beseech you, touch the Miracle of Jesus's driving the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple, because it is a hot one, and may possibly burn your Fingers. The Miracles, that I
have*

VIII DEDICATION.

have most ludicrously and, of consequence, most offensively handled, are the two of this present Discourse. If you please, my Lord, let them be the easy and short Task imposed on you. If you can defend the Letter of the Stories of these two Miracles, I'll quietly give up the Rest to you.

So heartily thanking your Lordship for the Favour done me, in taking Notice of my Discourses on Miracles, which shall be turn'd to good Use and Advantage, I subscribe myself,

My LORD,

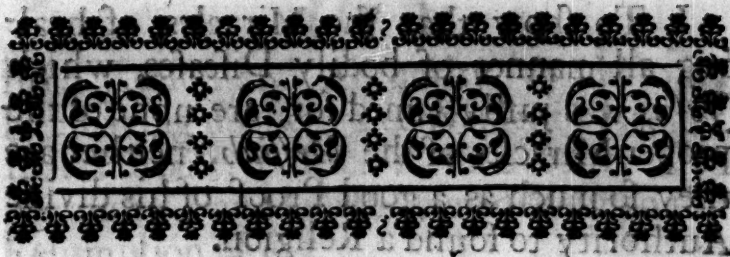
Your most obliged

Humble Servant,

Tho. Woolston.

Feb. 26.

1728.



A THIRD
DISCOURSE
ON THE
MIRACLES
OF OUR
SAVIOUR, &c.

MY two former Discourses having met with a favourable Reception, I am encourag'd to go on and publish another; which, without any more Preface, I enter upon, by a Repetition of the three general Heads, at first proposed to be spoken to; and they were,

B I

I. To show that the Miracles of healing all manner of bodily Diseases, which *Jesus* was justly famed for, are none of the proper Miracles of the *Messiah*, neither are they so much as a good Proof of his divine Authority to found a Religion.

II. To prove, that the literal History of many of the Miracles of *Jesus*, as recorded by the *Evangelists*, does imply Absurdities, Improbabilities, and Incredibilities; consequently they, either in whole or in part, were never wrought, as they are commonly believed now-a-days, but are only related as prophetic and parabolical Narratives of what would be mysteriously and more wonderfully done by him.

III. To consider, what *Jesus* means, when he appeals to his Miracles, as to a Testimony and a Witness of his divine Authority; and to show that he could not properly and ultimately refer to those he then wrought in the *Flesh*, but to those Mystical ones, that he would do in the *Spirit*, of which those wrought in the *Flesh* are but mere Types and Shadows.

Tho' I have already spoken, what may be thought sufficient, to the first of these Heads; yet I have several Things still, both from

from Reason and Authority, to add to it; but having nowhere a convenient Place for that Purpose, I defer it to a better Opportunity; and so pass immediately to the Resumption of my

II. Second general Head, and that is, to prove, that the literal History of many of the Miracles of *Jesus*, as recorded by the *Evangelists*, does imply Absurdities, Improbabilities and Incredibilities; consequently they, either in whole or in part, were never wrought, as it is commonly believed now-a-days, but are only related, as prophetical and parabolical Narratives of what would be mysteriously and more wonderfully done by him.

To this purpose I have taken into Examination six of the Miracles of *Jesus*, viz. those,

1. Of his driving the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple.

2. Of his exorcising the Devils out of the Mad-men, and sending them into the Herd of Swine.

3. Of his Transfiguration on the Mount.

4. Of his healing a Woman, that had an Issue of Blood, twelve Years.

5. Of his curing a Woman, that had a Spirit of Infirmary, eighteen Years, and

6. Of his telling the *Samaritan Woman* her Fortune of having had five Husbands, and being then an Adulteress with another Man.

Whether I have not prov'd the Storys of these Miracles, either in whole or in part, to consist of Absurdities, Improbabilities, and Incredibilities according to the Proposition before us, I leave my *Readers* to judge; and now will take in Hand

7. A Seventh Miracle of *Jesus*; viz. that (1) of his cursing the *Figtree*, for not bearing Fruit out of Season; which Miracle, upon the bare mention of it, appears to be such an absurd, foolish, and ridiculous, if not malicious and ill-natur'd Act in *Jesus*, that I question, whether, for Folly and Absurdity, it can be equalled in any Instance of the Life of a reputed wise Man. The Fathers, such as *Origen*, *St. Augustin*, *St. John of Jerusalem*, and others, have all said as smart Things, as the wittyest Infidels can, against the Letter of this Story. *St. Augustin* (2) very plainly says, that *this Fact in Jesus*, upon Supposition that it was done, was a foolish one. If therefore I treat

(1) *Matth. Chap. xxi. Mark, Chap. xi.*

(2) *Hoc factum, nisi figuratum, stultum invenitur. In Serm. lxxvii.*

this Story a little more ludicrously than ordinary, and expose the Folly of the Fact as well as of the modern Belief of it, I hope their Authority and Example will plead my Excuse for it.

Jesus was hungry, it seems, and being disappointed of Figs, to the Satisfaction of his Appetite, cursed the Figtree. Why so peevish and Impatient? Our *Divines*, when they please, make *Jesus* the most patient, resign'd and Easy under Sufferings, Troubles and Disappointments, of any Man. If he really was so, he could hardly have been so much out of Humour, for want of a few Figs, to the Allay of his Hunger. But to curse the Figtree upon it, was as foolishly and passionately done, as for another Man to throw the Chairs and Stools about the House; because his Dinner is not ready at a critical Time, or before it could be got ready for him.

But *Jesus* was hungry, some will say, and the Disappointment provoked him. What if he was hungry? He should, as he knew the Return of his Appetite, have made a better and more certain Provision for it. Where was *Judas* his Steward and Caterer with his Bag of Victuals as well as Money? Poor Fore-
cast

cast, and Management amongst them, or *Jesus* had never trusted to the uncertain Fruits of a Figtree, which he espy'd at a Distance, for his Breakfast.

And if *Jesus* was frustrated of a long'd for Meal of Figs, what need had he so to revenge the Disappointment on the (3) senseless and faultless Tree? Was it, because he was forc'd to fast longer than usual and expedient? not so; I hope neither: Could not Angels, if he was in a desert Place, have administred unto him? Or could not he miraculously have created Bread for himself and his Company, as he multiplyed or increased the Loaves for his Thousands in the Wilderness? What Occasion then for his being out of Humour for want of Food? If he was of Power to provide Bread for others on a sudden, he might sure have supply'd his own Necessities, and so have kept his Temper, without breaking into a violent Fit of Passion, upon present Want and Disappointment.

But what is yet worse, *The Time of Figs was not yet*, when *Jesus* look'd and long'd for them. Did ever any one hear

(3) Nulla esset Ligni Culpa, quia Lignum sine sensu non habebat Culpam. Augustin in Serm. lxxxix.

or read of any Thing more (4) unreasonable than for a Man to expect Fruit out of Season ; *Jesus* could not but know this before he came to the Tree, and if he had had any Consideration, he would not have expected Figs on it, much less, if he had regarded his own Reputation, as a wise Man, would he have so resented the Want of them. What, if a *Yeoman* of *Kent* should go to look for *Pipins* in his Orchard at *Easter*, (the supposed Time (5) that *Jesus* sought for these Figs) and, because of a Disappointment, cut down all his Trees ? What then would his Neighbours make of him ? Nothing less, than a *Laughing-Stock* ; and if the Story got into our publick News, he would be the Jest and Ridicule of Mankind. How *Jesus* salv'd his Credit upon this his wild Prank ; and prevented the Laughter of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* upon it, I know not ; but I can't think of this Part of the Letter of this Story, without smiling at it at this Day ; and wonder our *Divines* are not laugh'd

(4) Querit poma ; nesciebat tempus nondum esse ? quod Cultor Arboris sciebat, Creator Arboris nesciebat ? *Augustini in Sermoni lxxxix.*

(5) Hoc ideo probamus, quia Passionis Domini Dies propinquabat, & scimus quo tempore passus sit, *Ibid.*

out of Countenance for reading it gravely, and having *Jesus* in Admiration for it.

Again, I would gladly know, whose Fig-tree this was, and whether *Jesus* had any legal Right to the Fruit, if haply he had found any on it, or any Leave or Authority to smite it with a Curse for its Unfruitfulness. As to the Tree's being *Jesus's* Property, that could not be. For he was so far from being either *Landlord* or *Tenant*, that it's said he had not where to lay his Head. During the Time of his Ministry, he was but a Wanderer, like a mendicant Fryar, or an itinerant Preacher; and before that Time was no better than a Journey-man Carpenter (of whose Workmanship, I wonder, the Church of *Rome* has no holy Relicks, not so much as a Three-footed stool, or a Pair of Nutcrackers;) consequently he had no House nor Land of his own by Law, much less any Fig tree, and least of all *this* which he espy'd at a distance in his Travels. How then had he any Right to the Figs, if he had met with any? I hope he ask'd Leave beforehand of the Proprietor, or *Infidels* will say of him, that if he had had an Opportunity he would have been a *Rob-Orchard*. And if he had no Right to the Fruit, much less to smite the Tree with a Curse: Where was his
his

his Honour, (6) his Justice, his Goodness, and his Honesty in this Act; The *Evangelist*, if they would have us to think, *Jesus* did no wrong to any Man, should have left us somewhat upon Record to Satisfaction, in this Case; or *Infidels*, who have here Scope for it, will think worse of *Jesus*, than possibly he may deserve. Whether *Jesus*, modestly speaking, met with any Blame or Reprimand from the Proprietor, for this Act of Execration, none can affirm or deny. But if any one so spitefully and maliciously should destroy almost any other Tree, whether fruitful or not, of another Man's, in this Country, he would have good Luck, if he escap'd the House of Correction for it.

And what now have our *Divines* to say, to all this Reasoning against the Letter of this Story? Nothing more than “ That
 “ the Act of cursing the Figtree, whe-
 “ ther it be at this Distance of Time re-
 “ concileable to Reason, Justice and Pru-
 “ dence or not, was a supernatural Work,
 “ above the Power of Nature or Art to
 “ imitate, consequently it was a Miracle,
 “ and they will admire and adore *Jesus*

(6) Arbor non est justè siccata. *Johan Hierosol in Loc. Marci.*

“for it.” And to agree with them at present, that it was a real Miracle, and a supernatural Event, yet I hope, they’ll acknowledge, that if *Jesus*, as *St. Augustin* (7) says, had, instead of cursing the Figtree, made a dry, dead and withered one, immediately to bud, flourish and revive, and in an Instant to bring forth ripe Fruits, out of Season, it would have pleased them much better. Such an Instance of his Power had been an indisputable Miracle: Such an Instance of his divine Power had carry’d Goodness along with it, and none of the foresaid Exceptions could have been made to it: Such an Instance of his Almighty Power, had been a Demonstration of his being Lord of the Creation, and Author of the Fruits of the Earth for the Use of Man, in their Season, or he could not have produced them out of Season. In such an

(7) Si miraculum fuerat tantummodo commendandum, & non aliquid propheticæ figurandum, multo clementius dominus & sua misericordia dignius fecerat. Si quam aridam invenerit, viridem redderet, sicut languentes sanavit. Tunc vero e contrario, quasi adversus Regulam Clementiæ suæ invenit Arborem virentem, præter tempus fructus nondum habentem, non tamen fructum agricolæ regantem, & aridam fecit. *In Serm. lxxxix. Sæc. 3.*

Instance

Instance of Power, in his divine Care and Providence against Hunger and Want would have been visible; and it would have been an Admonition to us, to depend daily upon him for the Comforts and Necessaries of Life: Such an Instance of his Power would have been, as *St. Augustin* says above, like his Miracles of healing Diseases, of making the Languid, Sound; and the Feeble, Strong; and we might more certainly have infer'd from one with the other, that both were the Operations of a good God. But this Instance of his *cursing the Figtree* in this Fashion spoils the Credit, and sullies the Glory of his other Miracles. It is in its own Nature of such a malevolent Aspect, that its enough to make us suspect the Beneficence of *Christ* in his other Works, and to question whether there might not be some latent Poyson and diabolical Design under the Colour of his fairer Pretences to Almighty Power. It is so like the malignant Practices of *Witches*, who, as Stories go, upon Envy, Grudge, or Distaste, sinne their Neighbours Cattle with languishing Distempers, till they die, that it's hard, if not impossible, to distinguish one from the other in Spite and Malice. If *Mahomet*, and not *Jesus*, had been the Author

of this Miracle, our *Divines* would presently have discover'd the *Devil's Foot* in it, and have said that *Satan* drew him into a Scrape, in the Execution of this mad and foolish Frolick, on purpose to expose him for a *Wizard* and his Mussub-men of all Ages since for Fools in believing on him. The Spirit of *Christ*, who is all Love and Mercy, should, one would think, breath forth nothing but Goodness and Kindness to Mankind; but that such a pestilential Blast, like a mortiferous North-East Wind, in some Seasons, should proceed from his Mouth, to the Destruction of another Man's harmless and inoffensive Tree, is what none upon Earth can account for.

Our *Divines*, one or other of them, have publish'd several notable Notions about Miracles, and have laid down good Rules to distinguish true from false ones; but none of them, as far as I perceive, have taken any Pains to shew the Consistence of *Jesus's* Miracles to their own Rules and Notions. Mr. *Chandler*, (who as the *Archbishop* (8) says, has rightly stated the Notion of a Miracle) among

(8) See *Arch-bishop Wake's* Letter to Mr. *Chandler*, which is handed about Town and Country.

his Rules of judging by whom Miracles are perform'd, says, (9) *That the Things pretended to be done, are to be such, as that it is consistent with the Perfections of God to interest himself in ; and again, they must be such as answer to the Character of God as a good and gracious Being ; and again, It seems reasonable to believe, that whenever the first and best of Beings is pleased to send an extraordinary Messenger with a Revelation of his Will, he will furnish him with such Proofs of his Mission, as may argue not only the Power of him in whose Name he comes, but his Love to Mankind, and his Inclination to do them good. I have no Dislike to these Notions of Mr. Chandler ; but as it is not to be questioned, that he (and the Archbishop too) had this Miracle of Jesus's cursing the Figtree, and some others, as of his boisterous driving the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple ; of his sending the Devils into the Herd of Swine ; of his turning Water into Wine for the Use of Men, who had before well drank, &c. in his View, when he gave forth the foresaid Rules ; (for acute and learned Writers in Theology are supposed to have their Wits about them :) so it is*

(9) *Vindication of the Christian Religion, p. 82.*

to be hop'd, that he or the *Archbishop* will soon publish somewhat to reconcile these Miracles of *Jesus* to their own Notions; tho I don't expect it before *latter Lamas*.

But after all, it may be questioned, if *Infidels* should go about it, whether this Work of *Jesus* was miraculous; and whether there was not more of the Craft of Man, than of the Power of God in it; or to use *Mr. Chandler's* (10) Words, whether it don't look like the little Tricks and cunning Deceits of Impostors. *St. Matthew* says, presently the Figtree withered away; but this presently is an indeterminate Time, and may be understood of a Day, or a Week or two, as well as of the Moment in which these Words were spoken; Let no Fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. *St. Mark* says, that in the Morning as the Disciples passed by, they saw the Figtree dry'd up from the Roots, which was at least the Day (11) after the Curse was utter'd; so that there was certainly four and twenty Hours for its withering; and if it is said that the Tree dry'd up from the Roots, it does not imply that the Trunk of it perish'd, or was re-

(10) *Ibid.* (11) Quod sequenti die viderint exaruisse scum. *Theophylact. in Locum Marci.*

duc'd to nothing; but only that the green Leaves of the Whole, and of every Part of it, where in a withering Condition. And might not all this be done without a Miracle? What if *Jews* and *Infidels* should say, that *Jesus*, being minded to impose on his Disciples and Followers, took a secret Opportunity beforehand to lay his Carpenter's Axe to the Root of this Tree, and so imperceptibly circumcised it, as that the Leaves did, what they will do, wither in a Night and a Day's Time. God forbid, that I should think, *Jesus* did so; but as to the Possibility of such a Fraud in an Impostor, none can doubt of it.

I am so far from thinking there was any such Fraud in this supposed Miracle of *Jesus*, that I don't believe it was at all done by him according to the Letter: And for this I have not only a clear and intrinsic Proof from the Story itself; but the Authority of the Fathers. *St. Ambrose*, treating on the Parable of the Figtree in (12) *St. Luke*, intimates, that what *St. Matthew* and *St. Mark* write of *Jesus's* cursing the Figtree, is but (13) Part of the same Pa-

(12) Chap. xiii. (13) Quid sibi vult, quod in Evangelio suo Dominus Rici Parabolam frequenter inducit: Habes enim alibi, quod jussu Domini Viriditas omnis hujus Ligni frondentis aruerit. In Loc. *Luce*.

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rable. And *St. John of Jerusalem* (14) says expressly enough, that the three *Evangelists* write of one and the same Fig-tree, consequently parabolically, and that, what *St. Matthew* and *St. Mark* write of it, was no more a literal Transaction, than the Parable in *St. Luke*. Thanks to these holy Fathers for their ridding us of the Belief of the Letter of this Story, which otherwise might have perplex'd us with its Absurdities before urg'd. And to their Opinion I desire it may be added and considered, whether it be not as reasonable in itself to take what the three *Evangelists* write of this Fig-tree, as Part of one Story, as well as, what they write of the *Woman with her Issue of Blood*, and of *Jesus's casting the Devils out of the Mad-men*, and of other Miracles which are but several Relations of the same Story, Parable or Miracle. Neither is it any Argument for a literal Transaction of this Miracle, that the *Evangelists* speak of it, as a Thing done: For, as *Origen* says, there are some Things spoken of, in the *Evangelists*, as Facts, which were never transacted; so it is of the Nature of Prophecy (and our

(14) Videamus, ubi alibi scriptum de ista ficu; in Evangelio secundum Lucam legimus, &c. In *Lor. Marc.* Hom. xii.

Saviour in his whole Life prophesied) to speak of Things to come, as if they were already past ; because such Prophecies are not to be understood till after their Accomplishment, and then the Reason of the Use of the *prater*, instead of the *future* Tense, in Prophecy will be visible. But what, in my Opinion, is an absolute Demonstration, that there's no Truth in the Letter of this Story, is, what our Saviour adds, upon the Disciples wondering at the sudden withering of the Figtree, saying, (15) *that if they had Faith, they should not only do what was done to the Figtree ; but should say to this Mountain, (that was near him, I suppose) be thou removed and cast into the Sea, and it shall be done.* But these Things were never literally done by them, consequently Jesus himself did not literally curse the Figtree ; or the Disciples wanted Faith for the doing the said Miracles, which is an Absurdity to suppose ; or Jesus talked idly of a Promise to invest them with a Power, they were never to be possess'd of. But of what ill Consequence to Religion, either of these Suppositions is, let the old Ob-

(15) *Matth. Chap. xxi. 21.*

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jection in *Paschasius Rathbertus* (16) speak ; which I shall not stay here to urge and revive ; but only say at present, that if *Jesus* actually cursed a Figtree, his Disciples ought to have done so too, and to remove Mountains. If we adhere to the Letter in one Case, we must in the other also ; but we are only to look to the Mystery in both, or *St. Augustin* (17) will tell us, that *Jesus* utter'd vain, empty and insignificant Words and Promises.

St. Augustin, who believes no more of the Letter of this Story, than I do, says, that the Works of *Jesus* are all figurative and of a spiritual Signification, which is so manifest from his Act of cursing the Figtree, as Men must, (18) *whether they will or not*, acknowledge it. But he is mistaken : Tho' there might be none in his Time

(16) Quamquam igitur juxta Literam hæc facta non legantur ab Apostolis, sicut quidam Paganorum calumniati sunt, & garriunt contra nos, etiam in suis scriptis asserentes Apostolos non habuisse fidem, quia montes non traxerunt neque Ficulneas verbo extirparunt. *In Loc. Matth.*

(17) Legimus Apostolorum miracula, nusquam autem legimus arborem ab his arefactam, aut montem in mare transfactum ; queramus ergo in mysterio ubi factum sit, non enim Verba Domini vacare poterant. *In Serm. lxxxix.*

(18) Sed futurum aliquid Miraculo commendasse, multa sunt quæ nos admoneant, nobisq; persuadeant, imo ab *imittis* extorqueant. *Ibid.*

who

who would question, that this supposed Fact of *Jesus* had a mystical Signification; yet if he had liv'd in our Days, he would have met with *Divines*, who, for all the foresaid Absurdities and their Cogency to drive us to Allegory, do adhere to the Letter only, whether the Truth, Credibility and Reasonableness of it be defensible or not. But then to do Justice to *St. Augustin's* Assertion, he would have met with others, who *against their Wills*, interpret this Miracle figuratively, such as *Dr. Hammond* and *Dr. Whitby*, who say. *Jesus* cursed the Figtree by way of Type of the Destruction of the *Jewish* State, which declined and wasted away after the Similitude of this withering Tree. But why then don't these *Commentators* allegorically interpret and apply other Miracles of our Saviour? Because they think the Letter will stand good and abide the Test without an Allegory. And why do they allegorise this Miracle only? Because of the Difficulties and Absurdities of the Letter, which they can't account for. And are these Reasons good? No, certainly. The *Evangelists* should have made the Distinction for them. They should have told us, which Miracles are to be allegoris'd and mystically applied, and which are not;

or we are to allegorise all or none at all. And how came these modern Allegorists of this Miracle to apply it as they do, and to make it a mystical Representation of the Ruin of the *Jewish* State? Did they take up this Notion of their own Heads, or did they borrow it of the Fathers? Why in all Probability they took the Hint from the Fathers; wherefore then don't they, what none of them do, cite and acknowledge their Authors for it? Because, like Men of Subtily, they would be thought to devise it of themselves; for if they had quoted the Fathers for it, the Fathers would have oblig'd them, upon their Authority, to allegorise the rest of *Jesus's* Miracles, in the way that I have interpreted some of them; but this would not have agreed with their Stomachs for many Reasons. No Thanks then to the foresaid *Commentators* for their allegorical Application of this Miracle, which they are again to desert, or abide the Consequence of allegorising others also, which for their Interests and Reputations they will not do. Therefore let them return again to the Letter of this Miracle, and say for it, what is all that is to be said for it, with *Victor Antiochenus*, an Apostatical Writer of the fifth

fifth Century, (19) that when we read this Passage of Scripture concerning the Figtree, Jesus cursed, we ought not curiously to enquire whether it was wisely or justly done of Jesus, or not; but we ought to contemplate and admire this Miracle, as well as that of Jesus's drowning the Swine, notwithstanding some think it void of the Face of Justice. Ay, ay, our Divines must allegorise all Jesus's Miracles, or betake themselves to this Opinion of Victor, which this free-thinking Age will hardly let them quietly rest in. So, supposing our Divines to be, what they generally are, still Ministers of the Absurdity of the Letter, I pass to the Consideration of the Authority of the Fathers, and to see, whether we can't learn of them this Parable of the Figtree.

Who or what is meant by the Figtree seems not to be agreed among the Fathers; or, more properly speaking, they are not agreed, all of them, to apply it always to

(19) Porro quando in hunc locum incidimus; nemo curiose inquirat, aut anxie disputet, justene an secus factum sit; sed Miraculum editum contempletur & admiretur. Nam de submersis Porcis quoq; nonnulli hanc questionem moverant, factumq; justitiæ colore destitutum prædicare veriti non sunt. *In Loc. Marci.*

one and the same Thing. Some, as (20) *Gregory the Great*, say Human Nature or Mankind is typified by the Figtree. Others, as (21) *St. Hilary*, say the Jewish Church or State is meant by it. Others, as (22) *Origen* say, it is a Type of the Church of Christ. So do the Fathers seem to be divided in their Opinions; but it is without any Difference or Inconsistency with each other. For as there is, according to the Fathers, Mystery upon Mystery in all the Actions of *Jesus*; so I believe the Figtree here, as a Type, may be properly enough apply'd to the foresaid three Purposes. And if the Fathers had been ask'd their Opinion in this Case, I dare say, they would have said so too. This is certain, that *Origen* (23) understands it as applicable to the Jewish as well as the Christian Church. And *St. Augustin*, as Occasion offers itself, takes it in the foresaid three Senses. When they understand it as a Type of all Mankind, they say that the three Years of its Un-

(20) Quid Arbor fici, nisi humanam naturam designet? In *Homil. xxxi.*

(21) In Ficu, Synagogæ positum Exemplum est. In *Loc. Matt.*

(22) Absit a nobis, ut, Jesu veniente ad nos & volente manducare de ficu (*Ecclesia*) non inveniat Fructus in ea. In *Matth. Tract. xxx.*

(23) Potest autem ficus illa intelligi populus Circumcisionis. *Ibid.*

fruitfulness

fruitfulness are to be interpreted of the (24) *three grand Periods* of the World; the *one* before the Law of *Moses*; *another* under the Law; and the *third* under the Gospel; at the Conclusion of which *third* Period, as it was an antient and common Opinion, *Jesus* in Spirit would come to his Figtree of Mankind, and animadvert on them for their Unfruitfulness, not by any Destruction of human Nature, but by a Cessation of its Unfruitful State, which then will wither away, and be turn'd into a fruitful one against the grand Sabbath, or acceptable Year, which is the Year signified in the Parable, *that it is to be let alone to bring forth Fruit in.* They that understand the Figtree as a Type of the *Jewish* State, mean, by the *three Years* that *Jesus* came to it, the *three Years* of his preaching among the *Jews*; at the End of which, after *Christ's* Passion and Resurrection, the *Jewish* State, like the Figtree, withered away, and for its Unfruitfulness, was rooted up. They that understand the Figtree as a Figure of the Church of *Christ*, by the *three Years*, mean the apocalyptical

(24.) Arbor ficulnea Genus humanum, est. — Triennium autem tria sunt Tempora, unum ante Legem, alterum sub Lege, tertium sub gratia. *St. Augustin in Serm. cx.*

twelve

twelve hundred and sixty Days (that is, three Years and a half) of the Church's barren and unfruitful State in the Wilderness; at the Conclusion of which, the Fathers say *Jesus* will come again to his Church or Figtree, seeking Fruit on it.

Some perhaps may be ready here to interpose with a Question, and say, how will *Jesus* then come to his Church? I have carefully perused the Fathers upon this Question, and can't find that they mean any more by *Christ's* second or spiritual Advent, than that clear *Truth*, right *Reason* and divine *Wisdom* (which are the mystical Names of *Jesus*) will descend upon the Church, on the Clouds of the Law and the Prophets, to the Removal of her unfruitful and unprofitable Errors, and to enable her to bring forth the Fruits of the Spirit, against the grand Sabbath. Neither can any reasonable Man conceive how otherwise (25) *the Lord* should come, (not with ten thousand of his Saints, as our Translation has it, but) *as Origen* interprets, in his holy thousands of Allegorists *to criticise upon all the Scripture, and to convince Ministers of the Letter of their*

(25) *Jude*, ver. 14.

abominable Errors, and of their horrid Blasphemies spoken, preach'd, and printed against the Holy (Ghost or) Spirit of the Law and Prophets. As to that literal and common Pulpit-Story (with all its Appendages) of *Jesus's* second Coming on ætherial Clouds, as on a Wool-sack, in his human, tho' glorious and majestic Appearance, for the Resurrection of Mens Bodies, by the Sound of a Trumpet, in the Audience of the Dead, &c. it is the most absurd, nonsensical and unphilosophical, (such groundless and worthless Stuff have the *Clergy* sold and preach'd to God's People!) that ever was told against Reason, against prophetick and evangelical Scripture, and against other ancient and good Authority. It is no Place here to multiply Testimonies and Arguments to either of these Purposes, which my *Readers*, if they do but attend, will see no Occasion for. But if our *Divines* should think I have put a false Gloss on the Text of *St. Jude* above, I have a Bundle of Arguments and Testimonies to produce in Defence of it, at their Service.

In the Parable of *St. Luke*, it is said, *Lo, these three Years come I seeking Fruit on this Figtree*; as if *Jesus* came annually and successively for *three Years* together; but according to the Original, it ought to

be read, *Lo, it is three Years and I now come, or Lo, the three Years are now past, and I come.* And here it is to be noted, that whether we understand the Figtree, as a Figure of the Church in particular, or of Mankind in general; the mystical Number of *three Years* will terminate about the same Time, against the Evangelical Sabbath, on which the Unfruitfulness of the Church, or of Mankind, according to the Fathers, is to have an End put to it.

And *Jesus* when he came to the Figtree; found nothing thereon but Leaves only: So *Jesus*, when he comes to his Church, will find nothing in her but Leaves only. And what is here meant by Leaves? Let the Fathers, such as (26) *St. Hilary*, *St. John* (27) of *Jerusalem*, and (28) *St. Theophylact* tell us, who by Leaves understand a vain and empty Appearance of Wisdom and good Works; or the Words and Letter of the Scriptures, which are the Leaves of the Oracle, with-

(26) *Inveniet infœundam, foliis tantummodo vestitam, id est Verbis inanibus gloriantem, sed fructibus vacuam, Operibus quippe bonis sterilem. In Loc. Matt.*

(27) *Habentem folia & non fructus; Verba, non Sensus; Scripturas, non intelligentiam Scripturarum. In Loc. Marci.*

(28) *Folia sola habentem, hoc est, apparentem Litteram, non Fructus Spiritus. In Loc. Matt.*

out

out any Figs of Spiritual Interpretations of them. And whether this ben't the Case of the Church at present, our *Divines* are to consider. The Figs that *Jesus* may be supposed to look for at his Coming, are not only the Fruits of the Spirit mention'd by *St. Paul*, but (29) *Spiritual Interpretations* of the Scriptures, which *St. Jerome* (30) says are *mystical Figs*; because, as ripe Figs are sweet to the Palate of our Mouths, so are they no less delicious to the Soul of Man.

But *Jesus* is said to be hungry after Figs: so will *Jesus* in Spirit hunger for the mystical Figs of his Church, that is, as *Origen* (31) rightly interprets, he will earnestly desire, like a Man that is hungry, the Fruits of the Spirit in his Church, which will be as grateful to him as Figs can be to a Man naturally. To understand this Expression of *Jesus's Hunger* literally, is such a mean Circumstance of Life, that unless it be, what's next to impossible, necessarily introductory to some

(29) Querens non Sensiles Fructus sed intellectualem ex Lege & Prophetis dulcemq; Fructum. *Casarii in Dialog.* 40.

(30) Ficus sunt dona dulcissima Spiritus Sancti, Spiritualia dogmata & Scientia Scripturarum. *In Aggai.* Cap. ii.

(31) Esurit autem *Jesus* semper in iustis, volens manducare Fructum Spiritus Sancti in eis. *In Matt. Tract.* xxx.

noble Transaction, it's unfit to be remember'd of a Saint in History. *Diogenes Laertius* would have disdain'd to mention such a frivolous Circumstance in the Life of a Philosopher as *this* of *Jesus*. But if we understand this *Hunger* in *Jesus* mystically, and figuratively, of his Desires of the Fruits of the Spirit in his Church, it is sublime and noble; and the Emblem confessedly proper and instructive.

But *Jesus* is said to come to the Fig-tree at an unseasonable Time; *For the Time of Figs was not yet*; which Expression has been the Perplexity of Commentators, who with all their Wit and Sagacity can't well get over it. I shall not mention here all or any of their pretended Solutions of this Difficulty; but let us see whether we can't easily and at once unlose it. St. Mark's Words are *οτι ουκ ην καιρος συκας*, which are and have been commonly translated, *For the Time of Figs was not yet*. But if we change the Point into an Interrogation, and read thus, *for was it not the Time of Figs?* the Difficulty vanishes as certainly, as that it is absurd to suppose *Christ* should come to his Fig-tree and look for Fruit, when he could not reasonably expect any. This my Solution of this Difficulty certainly serves the Purpose of the mystical Interpretation;

on; and if it does not the literal, I answer, we are not to heed the Letter, which seldom or never has any Sense or Truth in it. But by the by, it does the literal too, since there are no Grounds from the Text to think, what has been the common Opinion, that it was about the Jewish Passover, that Jesus came to the Figtree. If this my Solution of the Difficulty don't please, I must say with (32) *Heinsius*, that it must be left as a Knot for *Elias* to unite, who according to the (33) antient Jews, is first to gather Fruits off this mystical Figtree, and present them to the intellectual Taste of Mankind. But, that my Solution is good, will appear by what follows.

And Jesus finding Leaves only says, in St. Matthew, to the Figtree, *Let no Fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever*; which (with its parallel Place in St. Mark) is in my Opinion a false Translation: The Original is, *Μηκέτι ἐκ σου κεραι- γένῃσι καὶ ὅτι αἰῶνα*, and ought to be eng-

(32) Ad quem (Locum) intelligendum, ut oportet, expectandum esse Eliam, ut nonnunquam loquuntur Veteres de Locis obscurissimis, Adventum. In *Exercitiis Sac. Lib. ii. cap. 6.*

(33) Fructus dulces omne genus de arbore Vitz comedendum præbebit Elias. *Apud Buxtorf. Synag. p. 738.*

lished, *not as yet, or not until now,* (that I come) *against the (grand) Age* (of the Sabbath) has Fruit grown on thee. So that the Miracle of *Jesus* was to make the Figtree of the Church fruitful; and if her preceeding unfruitful State, which (in *St. Mark*) *Jesus* is said to curse, or rather to devote to Ruin, wasted away, it was by Consequence.

But what Time of Day was it that *Jesus* came to the Figtree? It was in the *Morning*. And of what Day? That is uncertain as to the Letter, but according to the mystical Extent of the *Three Years*, whether we understand the Figtree as a Type of the Church, or of all Mankind of all Ages, it will be on the *Morning* of the great Sabbath, when, upon the Appearance of the Light of Christ, like the Rising of the Sun, an unfruitful and erroneous Church must needs wither away. And the Disciples on the said *Morning*, will, as *Origen* (34) says, with their intellectual Eyes behold her waste with Admiration, And then too, they under Christ will do what is done to the Figtree, of the Church, and remove Mountains of Anti-christian Power, that exalt themselves a-

(34) Oculis Spiritualibus viderunt. *Mysterium scti siccate.*
Mar. Tract. xvi.

gainst him, as the Fathers interpret, and I need not explain.

And what is meant by the Means, which St. Luke speaks of, to make the Figtree of the Church fruitful on the Sabbatical Year; *the Year it is to be let alone to bear Fruit in?* There must be digging about it, that is (35) into the Earth of the Letter of the Scriptures, and dunging of it, that is calling (39) to Remembrance her Sins and Errors of the Time past, which rationally speaking will make the Church to bring forth good Fruit.

After this Fashion is the rest of the Parable of the Figtree to be allegorized, out of the Fathers. St. Gregory (37) the Great, and St. Augustin, make these two Stories or Parables, viz. of the Figtree, and of the Woman with her Spirit of Infirmary, as they are blended together in St. Luke, to be Figures of the same Mystery. The

(35) Effodientes Literam Legis. Cyril. Glaphyr. L. 1. P. 1.

(36) Mittitur ergo Cophinus Stercoris ad Radicem Arboris, quando pravitatis suae Conscientia tangitur memoria Cogitationis. Gregor. M. in Hom. xxxi.

(37) Sed hoc significat Ficulnea infructuosa, quod Mulier inclinata; & hoc Ficulnea reservata, quod Mulier erecta. Hoc autem & octodecem Annorum Numero significatur, quod tertio die Dominus Vine Ficulneam venisse perhibetur. In Homil. xxxi.

eighteen Years of the Woman's Infirmity and the *three Years* of the Figtree's Unfruitfulness, they will have to be mystically synchroical. And the Woman's *Incurvity* to the Earth is, they say, significative of the same Thing with the *Unfruitfulness* of the Figtree. And the *Erection* of the Woman on the Sabbath is of the same Import with the *Reservation* of the Tree for Fruitfulness on that Day. And let any one see, if they don't admirably agree, as I have interpreted these two Parables.

Before I dismiss this Story of the Figtree, I can't but adore the Providence of God, that the Miracle has been hitherto placed in the withering away of the Tree. If the Miracle had been a plain Story of a dead and wither'd Tree's being made to bring forth Leaves and Fruit on a sudden; this would have been such a manifestly supernatural Work, and so agreeable to modern *Nationists* about Miracles, that Mens Thoughts would have been so absorpt in the Consideration of the Letter as they would never have extended them to the Contemplation of the Mystery. And our Divines would have made such a Noise, in our Ears, of the Excellency and Marvellousness of such a Miracle, as that there would be no bearing of it. But

But as the *Evangelists* have, in a good Measure, suppress'd all mention of the after Fruitfulness of the Tree; and the Story, by Misconstruction, is clog'd with the foresaid Difficulties and Absurdities, we are of Necessity driven to the search after Mystery for good Sense and Truth in it.

And thus have I spoken enough to the Miracle of *Jesus's cursing the Figtree*, which according to the Letter is a foolish and absurd Story: But the mystical Operation, of which the Letter is a Shadow, will be ravishing, marvellous and stupendous; and not only a Proof of *Christ's* Power and Presence in his Church, but a Demonstration of his *Messiahship*, in as much as an infinite Number of Prophecys upon Prophecys, will thereupon be discern'd to be accomplish'd, or the Church can't bring forth the Fruits of the Spirit, that is Spiritual Interpretations of the Scriptures, like ripe Figs. And so I pass to an

8. *Eighth* Miracle of *Jesus*, and that is, (38) " of his healing a Man of an
" Infirmary, of thirty eight Years Duration, at the Pool of *Bethesda*, that had
" five Porches, in which lay a great Multitude of impotent Folk, blind, halt,

(38) *John*, Chap. v.

F

* withered,

“ withered, waiting the troubling of the
 “ Waters, upon the Descent of an An-
 “ gel, who gave a Sanative Virtue to them,
 “ to the curing of any one, be his Distem-
 “ per of what kind soever, who first
 “ stepped down into them.

This whole Story is what our Saviour calls a *Camel* of a monstrous Size for Absurdities, Improbabilities and Incredibilities, which our *Divines*, and their implicit Followers of these last Ages, have swallowed without chewing; whilst they have been straining at *Knats* in Theology, and hesitating at frivolous and indifferent Things of the Church, of no Consequence.

As to *Jesus's* Miracle in this Story, which consisted in his healing a Man, of no body knows what *Infirmity*, there neither is nor can be proved any Thing supernatural in it, or there had been an express Description of the Disease, without which it is impossible to say, there was a miraculous Cure wrought. As far as one may reasonably guess, this Man's *Infirmity* was more *Laziness* than *Lameness*, and *Jesus* only shamed him out of his pretended Illness, by bidding him to take up his Stool and walk off, and not lie any longer, like a lazy Lubbard and Dissembler, among the Diseased, who were real Objects of Pity and Compassion : Or,
 if

if he was no Dessembler, he was only fancyfully sick, and *Jesus* by some proper and seasonable Talk touch'd his Heart, to his Relief; and so, by the Help of his own Imagination, he was cured, and went his Way. This is the *worst* that can be made of this *infirm* Man's Case; and the *best* that can be said of *Jesus's* Power in the Cure of him, as will appear, by and by, upon Examination into it. But the other Parts of the Story of the healing Virtue of the Waters, upon the Descent of an Angel into them, is not only void of all good Foundation in History, but is a Contradiction to common Sense and Reason, as will be manifest after an Inquiry into the Particulars of it.

St. *John* was the beloved Disciple of our Lord, and I hope he lov'd his Master, or he was worse than an Heathen, who loves those who love him: But this Story, and some others, that are peculiar to his Gospel, such as, of *Jesus's* telling the *Samaritan Woman* her Fortune; of his healing the blind Man with Eye-Salve made of Clay and Spittle; Of his turning Water into Wine for the Use of Men, who had before well drank; and of his raising *Lazarus* from the Dead, are enough to tempt us to think, that he wilfully design'd, either to blast the Reputation of his Master,

or to try how far the Credulity of Men, who thro' blind Love were running apace into Christianity, might be imposed on; otherwise he had never related such idle Tales, which, if the *Priesthood*, who should be the philosophical Part of Mankind, had not been amply hired into the Belief of them, would certainly have been rejected with Indignation and Scorn before now.

St. *John* wrote his Gospel many Years after the other *Evangelists*: What then should have been his peculiar Business? Certainly nothing more, than to add some remarkable Passages of Life, to *Jesus's* Honour, which they had omitted; and to confirm the Truths which they had before reported of him. But St. *John* is so far from doing this, that the Stories, he has particularly added, are not only derogatory to the Honour of *Jesus*, but spoil his Fame for a Worker of Miracles, which the other *Evangelists* would raise him to. By reading the other *Evangelists*, one would think, that *Jesus* was a Healer of all manner of Diseases, however incurable by Art and Nature, and that where-ever he came, all the sick and the maim'd (excepting a few Unbelievers) were perfectly cured by him. But this Story before us will be like a Demonstration, that *Jesus* was no such Worker of Miracles and Healer

Healer of Diseases, as he is commonly believed to have been; and that he wrought not near the Number of Cures, he is supposed to have done, much less any great ones. The best Conception that an impartial Reader of the Gospel can form of *Jesus*, is, that he was a tolerable good natural *Orator*, and could handsomely harangue the People off hand, and was according to the Philosophy of the Times a good *Cabalist*; and his Admirers finding him endued with the Gift of Utterance, which was thought by them more than human, they fancy'd he must have the Gift of healing too, and would have him to exercise it; which he did with Success, upon the Fancies and Imaginations of many, who magnified his divine Power for it. And the Apostles afterwards, to help forward the Credulity and Delusion of the People, amplified his Fame with extravagant Assertions and strange Stories of Miracles, passing the Belief of considerate and wise Men. Whether this Representation of the Case, according to the *Letter* of the Gospels, be false and improbable, let my Readers judge by the Story before us, which I come now to dissect, and make a particular Examination into the several Parts of it. Accordingly it is to be observ'd,

First,

First, that this Story of the Pool of Bethesda, abstractedly considered from Jesus's Cure of an infirm Man at it, has no good Foundation in History: It merits no Man's Credit, nor will any Reasonable Person give any heed to it. St. John is the only Author that has made any mention of this Story; and tho his Authority may be good, and better than another Man's in Relation to the Words and Actions of Jesus, in as much as he was most familiar and conversant with him; yet, for foreign Matters, that have no immediate Respect to Jesus's Life he's no more to be regarded than another *Historian*, who, if he Palm upon his *Readers* an improbable Tale of senseless and absurd Circumstances, will have his Authority questioned, and his Story pry'd into by the Rules of *Criticism*, and rejected or received as it is found worthy of Belief and Credit. If there had been any Truth in this Story before us, I cannot think but *Josepbus* or some other *Jewish* Writers, it is so remarkable, peculiar and astonishing an Instance of the Angelical Care and Love to the distressed of *Jerusalem*, would have spoken of it: But I don't find they have; or our modern *Commentators* would have refer'd to them, as to a Testimony of the Credibility of the Gospel.

Gospel-History. *Josepbus* has professedly Written the History of the *Jewish* Nation, in which he seems to omit nothing that makes for the Honour of his Country, or for the Manifestation of the Providence of God over it. He tells us of the Conversation of Angels with the Patriarchs and Prophets, and intermixes Extra-Scriptural Traditions, as he thought them fit to be transmitted to Posterity. How came he then and all other *Jewish* Writers to forget this Story of the Pool of *Bethesda*? I think, we may as well suppose that a Writer of the natural History of *Somersetshire* would neglect to speak of the medicinal Waters of *Bath*, as *Josepbus* should omit that Story, which, if true, was a singular Proof of God's distinguishing Care of his peculiar People, or an Angel had never been frequently, as we suppose, sent to this Relief of the Diseased amongst them. Is then St. *John's* single Authority enough to convey this Story down to us? Some may say, that there are several Prodigies, as well as political Events of ancient Times, that, tho they are reported but by one Historian, meet with Credit; and why may not St. *John's* Testimony be equal to another Writer's? I grant it; and tho it is hardly probable but that this Story, if true, before
us,

us, must have had the Fortune to be told by others; yet St. *John's* single Authority shall pass sooner than another Man's, if the Matter be in it self credible and well circumstanc'd. But where it is blindly, imperfectly and with monstrously incredible Circumstances related, like this before us, it ought to be rejected. Which brings me,

Secondly, To ask, what was the true Occasion of the Angel's Descent into this Pool? Was it to wash and bath himself? Or, was it to impart an healing Quality to the Waters for some one diseased Person? The Reason, that I ask the first of these two Questions, is, because some ancient Readings of v. 4. say (39) the Angel ~~was~~ *was washed*, which supposes some bodily Defilement or Heat contracted in the Cælestial Regions, that wanted Refrigeration or Purgation in these Waters: But how absurd such a Thought is, needs no Proof. To impart then compassionately an healing Power to the Waters for the Benefit of the Diseased was the sole Design of the Angel's Descent into them. And God forbid, that any should philosophically debate the Matter, and enquire how naturally the Waters deriv'd that Virtue from the Angel's corporal

(39) Vid. Milli. Nov. Test. *In Loc.*

Presence. The Thing was providential and miraculous, our *Divines* will say, and so let it pass. But I may fairly ask, why one diseased Person only at a Time reap'd the Benefit? Or why the whole Number of impotent Folks were not at once healed? I have a notable Answer presently to be given to these Questions; but I am afraid beforehand, our *Divines* will not approve of it: Therefore they are to give one of their own, and make the Matter consistent with the Goodness and Wisdom of God; or the said Questions spoil the Credit of the Story, and make an idle and ridiculous Romance of it. And when their Hands are in, to make, what is impossible, a satisfactory Answer to the said Questions; I wish, that, for the sake of *Orthodoxy*, they would determine, whether the Angel descended with his Head or his Heels foremost, or whether he might not come swaeping upon his Breast into the Waters, like a Goose into a Horsepond. But,

Thirdly, How often in the Week, the Month or the Year did the Angel vouchsafe his Descent into the Pool? And for how many Ages before *Christ's* Advent, and why not since and even (40)

(40) Quare modo non movetur Aqua? *St. Ambros. de Sacrament. Lib. C. 2.*

now, was this Gracious and Angelical Favour granted? St. *John* should have been particular as to these Points, which he could not but know Philosophers would be curious to enquire about. If it was but once in the Year, as St. *Chrysostom* (41) hints, little Thanks are due to him for his Courtesy. One would think sometimes, that the Angel's Descent was frequent; or such a Multitude of impotent Folk, variously disorder'd had never attended on it. And again at other Times, one would think that his Descent was seldom, or the Diseased as fast as they came, which could not be faster than the Angel could dabble himself in the Waters, had been charitably dismissed with restor'd Health. Here then is a Defect in St. *John's* Story, and a Black, at which wise and considerate Free-Thinkers will stumble. But,

Fourthly, How came it to pass, that there was not better Care taken, either by the Providence of God, or of the Civil Magistrates of *Jerusalem* about the Disposal of the Angelical Favour to this or that poor Man, according to his Necessities or Deserts; But that he, who

could fortunately catch the Favour, was to have it. Just as he who runs fastest obtains the Prize : So here the Diseased, who was most nimble and watchful of the Angel's Descent, and could first plunge himself into the Pool, carried off the Gift of Sanation. An odd and a merry Way of conferring a divine Mercy. And one would think that the Angels of God did this for their own Diversion, more than to do good to Mankind. Just as some throw a Bone among a Kennel of Hounds, for the Pleasure of seeing them quarrel for it ; or as others cast a Piece of Money among a Company of Boys for the Sport of seeing them scramble for it : So was the Pastime of the Angels here. It was the Opinion of some Heathens, that *Homines sunt Lusus Deorum*, the Gods sport themselves with the Miseries of Mankind ; but I never thought, before I considered this Story, that the Angels of the God of the Jews did so too. But if they delighted in it, rare sport it was to them, as could be to a *Town-Mob*. For as the poor and distressed Wretches were not to be supposed to be of such a polite Conversation, as in Complaisance to give place to their betters, or in Compassion to make way for the most miserable ; but upon the Sight

or Sound of the Angel's Fall into the Pool,
 would without Respect of Persons strive who
 should be first : So those who were behind
 and unlikely to be cured, would like an
 unciviliz'd *Rabble*, push and press all
 before them into it. What a Number
 then, of some hundreds perhaps, of poor
 Creatures were at once tumbled into the
 Waters to the Diversion of the City Mob,
 as well as of God's Angels ? And if one
 arose out of them, with the Cure of his Dis-
 ease, the rest came forth like drown'd *Rats*,
 to the Laughter of the foresaid Specta-
 tors; and it was well if there was not some-
 times more Mischief done, than the heal-
 ing of *one* could be of Advantage, to those
 People. Believe then this Part of the Story,
 let him that can. If any Angel was con-
 cern'd in this Work, it was a Angel of
Satan who delights in Mischief; and if
 he healed *one* upon such an Occasion, he
 did it by way of Bait, to draw others
 into Danger of Life and Limb. But as
 our *Divines* will not, I suppose, bear the
 Thoughts of it's being a bad Angel; so
 I leave them to consider upon our Rea-
 sonings, whether it was credible that ei-
 ther a good or a bad Angel was concern-
 ed, and desire them to remember to give
 me a better Reason, why but *one* at a
 Time was healed.

If

If any Pool or Cistern of Water about this City of *London* was so blessed with the Descent of an Angel to such an End, the Magistrates, such is their Wisdom, would, if God did not direct, take care of the prudent Disposal of the Mercy to the best Advantage of the Diseased. And if they sold it to an infirm *Lord* or *Merchant*, who could give for it most Money, to be distributed among other Poor and distressed People, would it not be wisely done of them? To suppose they would leave the Angelick Favour to the Struggle of a Multitude, is absurd and incredible. And why then should we think otherwise of the Magistrates of *Jerusalem*? Away then with the Letter of this Story! And if this be not enough to confute it. Then, Fifthly, Let us consider, to its farther Constitution, who and what were the impotent Folk, that lay in the Porches of *Bethesda*, waiting the Troubling of the Waters. *St. John* says they were *Blind*, *Halt*, *Withered*, and as some Manuscripts (42) have it, *Paralyticks*. And what did any of these there? How could any of them be supposed to be nimble enough of Foot to step down first into the Waters, and carry off the Prize of Sanation, before

(43) Vid. Milli. Nov. Test. In Loc. fore

fore many others of various Distempers? Tho the troubled Waters might be of such medicinal Force as to heal a Man of whatsoever Disease he had; yet none of the foresaid Persons for want of good Feet and Eyes could expect the Benefit of it. Tho the Ears of the Blind might serve him to here, when the Angel plump'd like a Stone into the Waters, yet thro' want of Sight for the guidance of his Steps, he would by others be jostled out of the right Way down into them. And if the Lame had good Eyes to discern the Descent of the Angel, yet Feet were all in all to this Purpose. Consequently these impotent Folk, specified by St. *John*, might as well have stay'd at Home, as resorted to *Bethesda* for Cure. I know not what Fools the Diseased of *Jerusalem* of old might be, but if there was such a Prize of Health to be strove for, by the Distempred of this City, I appeal to all Men of common Sense, whether the *Blind*, the *Lame*, the *Withered* and *Paralyticks* would offer to put in for it. St. *John* then forgot himself, or else blundered egregiously, or put the Banter upon us, to try how far an absurd Tale would pass upon the World with Credit. There might be, if there was any literal Sense in the Story, many of other Distempers; but there could

be

be neither blind, halt nor withered, without *such an Absurdity*, as absolutely disparages the Story, blasts the Credit of the Relator, or rather brings to mind the Assertion of St. Ambrose, that the Letter of the *New* as well as of the *Old Testament* lies abominably. If what I have here said does not overthrow the Letter of this Story; Then what I have,

Sixthly, To add, will do it more effectually, and that is, of the *certain Man*, that *had an Infirmary thirty and eight Years*, and lay at this Pool for an Opportunity to be cured of it. Tho these *thirty and eight Years* are, in our *English Translation* prædicated of this *Man's Infirmary*, yet more truly, according to the Original, are they spoken of the Time he lay there; and the Fathers so understood St. *Jahn's* Words. What this *Man's Infirmary* was, we are uncertain: For *Weakness* or *Infirmary* is a general Name of all Distempers, and may be equally apply'd to one as well as to another: Whereupon, tho we can't certainly say from this *Man's Infirmary*, that he was a Fool to lay there so long, expecting that Cure, which it was impossible for him to obtain; yet what he says to our Saviour, *I have no Man, when the Waters are troubled to put me into the Pool, but while I am coming, another steppeth down before*

before me, does imply his Folly sufficient-
 ly, or rather the Incredibility of the whole
 Story. What then did this *infirm* Man at
 this Pool, if he had neither Legs of his
 own good enough, nor a Friend to assist
 him, in the Attainment of Sanation; Was
 he not a Fool, if it was possible for any
 to be so great a one, for his Patience?
 Would it not have been as wisely done
 of him to wait, in the Fields so long, the
 Falling of the Sky, that he might catch
 Larks? The Fathers say, this Man's *In-*
*firmit*y was the *Palsy*; but whether they
 said so for the Sake of the Mytery, or
 to expose the Letter, I know not. But *that*
Distemper after *thirty* and *eight* Years
 Duration, and Increase, if it was more
 curable than another at first, had in that
 time undoubtedly so weakened and render'd
 him incapable to struggle with others
 for this Relief, that it is without Sense and
 Reason to think he should wait so long for
 it. Our *Divines*, if they so please, may
 commend this Man for his Patience, but
 after a few Years, or rather a few Days
 Experience, another Man would have
 been convinc'd of the Folly and Vanity
 of his Hopes, and returned Home. If
 he could not put in for this Benefit, with
 Prospect of Success in his more youthful
 Days, when the Distemper was young too,
 much

much less Reason had he to hope for it in his old Age, after *thirty and eight Years* Affliction, unless he dream'd of, what was not to be imagined, an Opportunity, without Molestation and Competition, to go off with it. Whatever then our *Divines* may think of this Man and his Patience, I will not believe there ever was such a Fool; and for this Reason will not suppose *St. John* could literally so romance, unless he meant to bambouze Mankind into the Belief of the greatest Absurdity. A Man that Lies with a Grace to deceive others, makes his Story to hang together, as to carry the Face and Appearance of Truth along with it; which this of *St. John*, that for many Ages has been swallowed, for the Reason before us, has not. But what is the worst of all against this Story is,

Seventhly, That which follows, and absolutely destroys the Fame and Credit of *Jesus* for a Worker of Miracles. And *V. 1, 2, 3. Jesus went up to Jerusalem, where there was by the Sheep-Market, a Pool, called Bethesda, having five Porches, in which lay a great Multitude of impotent Folk, blind, halt, withered.* Why then did not *Jesus* heal them? Here was a rare Opportunity for the Display of his Healing and Almighty Power; and why

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did

did he not exercise it, to the Relief of that Multitude of impotent Folk? If he could not cure them, there's an End of his Power of Miracles; and if he would not, it was want of Mercy and Compassion in him. Which way soever we take this Case, it turns to the Dishonour of the Holy *Jesus*. What then was the Reason, that of so great a Multitude of diseased People, *Jesus* exerted his Power, and extended his Mercy, on only one poor Paralytick? St. *Augustin* (44) puts this Question and Objection into my Mouth; and tho neither He nor I start it for the Service of Infidelity, but to make Way for the Mystery; yet I know not why *Infidels* may not make Use of it, till Ministers of the Letter can give a satisfactory Answer and Solution to it.

The Evangelists, *Matthæw*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, tell such Stories of *Jesus's* healing Power, as would incline us to think he cured all where-ever he came. He *heal'd*, they say, *all Manner* of Diseases among the People, and they make mention of particular Times and Places, where all the Diseased were healed by him, which

(44) Tot jacebant & unus curatus, cum posset uno Verbo omnes erigere. Quid ergo intelligendum est, nisi quia Potestas & Bonitas illa magis agebat, &c. In *Lec. Joban.*

Assertions imply, that *Jesus's* healing Power
 was most extensive and (excepting to
 an hard-hearted and unbelieving *Pharisee*
 now and then) universal; so far, that it
 might be question'd, whether any died,
 during the Time of his Ministry, in
 the Places where he came: And our
Divines have so harangued on *Jesus's* Mi-
 racles, as would confirm us in such an
 Opinion: But this Story in *St. John*
 confutes and confounds all. *St. John* in
 no Place of his Gospel talks of *Jesus's*
 healing of many, nor of all manner of
 Diseases, much less of all that were Dis-
 eased; which, if it be not like a Contra-
 diction to the other *Evangelists*, is some Di-
 minution of their Authority, and enough to
 make us suspect, that they stretch'd much
 in praise of their Master, and said more
 to his Honour than was strictly true. But
this Place before us is a flat Contradiction
 to them; and *Jesus* is not to be sup-
 posed to heal many in any Place, much
 less all manner of Diseases, or he had never
 let such a *Multitude* of poor Wretches
 pass without the Exercise of his Power
 and Pity on them. Some good Reason
 then must be given for *Jesus's* Conduct
 here, and such a one as will adjust it
 to the Reports of the other *Evange-*
lists; or *Infidels* will think, that either
 H 2 they

they romanc'd for the Honour of their Master, or that St. *John* in Spite told this Story to the Degradation of him. I can conceive no better of this Matter according to the Letter.

The *Bishop* of *Lichfield* very remarkably says, (45) that *Jesus* where-ever he went, healed all that came to him without Distinction, the impotent, halt, withered. The *Bishop* certainly had this Text of St. *John* in his Eye, when he said so, because *Impotent, Halt, Withered*, are only mention'd here, where *Jesus* cured none of them: Whereupon if his *Lordship* had made but a marginal Reference to this Text, it would have been the best *Jest* and *Banter*, with a *Sneer*, that ever was put upon *Jesus* and his Power of Miracles: As it is, it's a very good one, and I desire my Readers to take Notice of it, that his *Lordship* may not lose the Credit and Praise of it. It's for such Circumspection of Thought, Exactness of Expression, and Acuteness of Wit, that I admire that *Prelate*, and must needs say of him, whether he ever be translated to *Canterbury* or *York*, or not, that he's an *Arch Bishop*.

(45) A Defence of Christianity, P. 415.

But

But to return and go on. The Conduct of *Jesus*, to all Appearance, is not only blameable, his Power of healing disputable, and his Mercy indefensible, for that he cured but *one* infirm Man out of a Multitude, at *Bethesda*, but,

Eighthly, and lastly, it may reasonably be questioned, whether he wrought any Miracle in the healing of this *one* Man. Miracles (to say nothing of the ridiculous Distinction between *Divine* and *diabolical* ones) are Works done out of the Course of Nature, and beyond the Imitation of human Art or Power. Now whether the Cure of this infirm Man can be brought under this Definition of a Miracle, may be doubted. What this Man's *Infirmity*, which is a general Name for all Distempers, was, we know not. How then can we say he was miraculously cured, unless we knew his Disease to be incurable by Art, which none can affirm? The worst that we know of this Man's Case, is, that it was of a long Continuance, no less than of *eight* and *thirty* Years: And the *Bishop* of *Lichfield* and others in their florid Harangues on *Jesus's* Works, make the Cure of such *Chronical* Diseases to be miraculous: But why so? Many Instances may be given of Infirmities of human Nature, of a long Duration,

ration, which in Time, and especially in old Age, wear off. If such Infirmities don't occur to the Memory of our *Divines*, I could put them in Mind of them. And who knows but this was the Case of this impotent Man, whose Infirmity *Jesus* observing to be wearing off, bid him to be gone, and take up his Couch, for he would soon be made whole.

The Fathers indeed call this Man's Infirmity, the *Palsy*, which in truth is generally worse than better by Time; and after *thirty* and *eight* Years, must needs be very deplorable, and incurable without a Miracle. But why do they call it the *Palsy*? They have no Authority for it from the Text, without which, as our *literal Doctors* will not subscribe to their Opinions in other Cases; so why should I here? In short, the Fathers had never call'd it the *Palsy*, but for the sake of the Mystery; and I am not bound to own *that* to have been the Distemper, any more than it was want of Legs; for that would be making of Miracles for *Jesus*, without Reason and Authority.

If *Jesus* here had healed the whole Multitude of impotent Folk; without Enquiry what Numbers there might be of them, I should have believed that he wrought there many great Miracles, in as much

much as in such a great Multitude, there must needs, in all Probability, be some incurable by Art or Nature; But since he cured only this *one* Man, it affords Matter of Speculation, whether he was the *most* or the *least* diseased amongst them. Our *Divines*, for the sake of the Miracle, may possibly suppose him to be the most grievously afflicted of any; but *Infidels*, on the other hand, will say, not so; but with their Cavils will urge, that this infirm Man was either a Dissembler, whom *Jesus* shamed out of his pretended Disease, or that he was only hippish, and fancifully more than really distemper'd of a long Time, whom *Jesus* by suitable Exhortations and Admonitions, working upon his Imagination, persuaded into a Belief of his Cure, and bid him to walk off. Certain it is, that *Infidels* will say, it was not a Power of Miracles in *Jesus* which heal'd him, or he had used it then and there for the Sanation of others also.

And thus have I finish'd my Invective against the Letter of this Story; which, if any are offended at, they enjoy, what is the most reasonable Thing in the World, the same Liberty to write for the Letter, which I have used against it: And so I pass to the Consideration of the Opinions

ons and Expositions of the Fathers on this strange Story.

The Fathers, upon whose Authority I form'd my preceding Invective against the Letter, so universally betake themselves to the mystical Interpretation of this Story, that it may be question'd, whether any of them, more than myself, believ'd any Thing at all of the Letter of it. St. Chrysostom, who is as much a literal Interpreter of the Scriptures as any of them, here intirely discards the Letter, saying admirably thus, (46) *what a strange Way and Story of healing the Diseased is here? but what is the Mystery of it? that we are to look to. The Matter could not be so simply and unadvisedly transacted literally, as it is related. There must be somewhat future here, as by a Type and Figure, signify'd; or the Story, it is so incredible in itself, will give Offence to many.* St. Chrysostom was certainly in the right on't; and I wonder, for which no Reason but want of Liberty can be

(46) Quis hic Curationis modus? quid hoc nobis mysterium significatur? non *απλως* nec *αυτη* hzc, sed futura nobis, tanquam imagine & figura quadam describuntur, ne res nimium incredibilis & inexpectata, accedente fidei Virtute, Multitudinis Animos offenderet. *In Loc. Johan.*

given

given, that *Infidels* have not before now, with their *Jests* and *Cavils*, ridiculed this Story. *St. Augustin*, to the same Purpose, says, (47) *Can any one believe, that these Waters of Bethesda were wont to be troubled in this Fashion, and that there was not Mystery, and a spiritual Signification in it?* Yes, I could tell *St. Augustin*, that our modern *Divines* seem to believe it, tho he, if he was now alive, would laugh at them for it. But to come to the profound *Mystery* signified by this Story, which to use the Words of (48) *St. Augustin*, as God shall enable me, I will now speak to.

Our *English Version* says, *There is at Jerusalem by the Sheep-Market, a Pool.* How our *Translators* came by the Notion of a *Market* here, I can't imagine, since there is nothing to favour it in the *Original*, which stands thus, *ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ ποιμαίνοντος*: By *ποιμαίνοντος*, the *Fathers* understand (49) *Baptism*, or the spiritual *Laz-*

(47) *Aqua turbata—credas hoc Angelica Virtute fieri solere, non tamen sine significante aliquo Sacramento.* In *Loc. Joh.*

(48) *Cujus Rei & cujus signi profundum mysterium, quantum Dominus donare dignatur, loquar ut potero.* Ibid.

(49) *Piscina illa Baptismum designat. Theophyl. In Loc.* Quenam igitur hæc descriptio? Futurum erat Baptisma plenum maxime Potestatis & Gratiz purgatum peccata. *Chrysost. in Loc.*

ver of Regeneration; and who is that for, but the Flock of Christ, signified by *re-calling*? So we have another and clearer Interpretation of these two Words.) And as to *Bethesda*, that is a mystical Name of the Church, which according to the Signification of *Bethesda*, is the House of Grace. And if it is said to be at *Jerusalem*, it is not to be understood of the Old *Jerusalem*, but of the New and Apocalyptic *Jerusalem*, at the Entrance into which the Flock of Christ will be baptiz'd by the Waters of the Spirit, as in mystical Laver.

Bethesda is said to have five Porches, that is, as the Fathers (50) agree, the five Books of *Moses*, which are as so many Doors of Entrance into the House of Wisdom, or of the Grace of Christ.

At these five Porches of the five Books of *Moses* lay a great Multitude of impotent Folk, blind, halt, withered. And who are these mystically? The ignorant, erroneous, and unstable in Faith and Principle, as the Fathers often understand them spiritually. And what is the Reason of these their mystical Diseases? Because, as

(50) Per quinque Porticus, quinque Libros Moysi intelligo. St. Theophil. Antioch. in Loc. Quinque Porticus sunt quinque Libri Moysi. St. August. in Loc.

St. *Augustin* (51) and other Fathers say, they rest on the Letter of the Law, which throws them into various Errors, like Diseases, of different Kinds, of which they can't be cured without the Descent of the Spirit, like an Angel, to instruct them mystically to interpret.

With these impotent Folk lay a certain Man who had an Infirmary. And who is this infirm Man? Mankind in general, say St. *Cyrl* (52) and (53) St. *Augustin*. And what is his Infirmary? The Fathers call it the (54) *Palsy*, because of his Instability, and Unsteadiness in Faith and Principles, which is now the Case of Mankind. St. *John* calls it *adversitas* Weakness, which being a general Name

(51) *Mosis quinque Libros scripsit, sed in quinque Porticibus Piscinam cingentibus languidi jacebant, & curari non poterant. Vide quomodo manet littera, convincens eum non salvans iniquum. Illis enim quinque Porticibus, in figura quinque Librorum prodebantur potius quam sanabantur ægroti. Ergo quicunque amatis litteram sine gratia, in Porticibus remanebitis, ægri eritis, jacentes non convalescentes, de littera enim presumitis. In Psal. lxx.*

(52) Est Figura Populi in ultimis temporibus sanandi. In Loc. *Johan.*

(53) Languidus ille, de quo in Evangelio legimus, quia jacebat. Typum Generis humani habere videbatur. In *Serm. cclxxiv. Append.*

(54) Paralyticum qui juxta Natatoriam jacebat. *Irenæi. Lib. ii. Cap. 22.*

of all Distempers, we can't guess what might be here the specifical one. But reasonably speaking, according to the Rule of Interpretation, this Man's *Infirmity* is the same with the Woman's *Spirit of Infirmity*, and that is a Weakness at the Spirit of Prophecy, which Mankind, as well as the Woman of the Church, is to be cured of in the Perfection of Time.

And how long did this Man with his Infirmity lay in these Porches of *Bethesda*? *Thirty eight Years*: So has Mankind with his Weakness at the Spirit of Prophecy lay eight and thirty (hundred) (55) Years, reckoning two thousand under the Law, and eighteen hundred since under the Gospel. St. *Augustin* (56) has an ingenious and more mystical way of Computation of these *thirty and eight Years*, which pleases me too, but possibly some Readers may not so easily apprehend it, unless they are well acquainted with the *Mystery of Prophetical Numbers*.

(55) Tempus & Annus sunt centum Anni. *Tichonij in Reg. 57.*

(56) Quod autem triginta & octo Annos in Languoribus positus erat, de illo Quadraginta numero, quem supra diximus duo minus habens; & quæ sunt ista duo, nisi duo præcepta, dilectio Dei & Proximi. Ista duo, in quibus tota Lex penderet & Prophetæ, si non habuerit, languidus & Paralyticus jacet. *In Ps. lxxxiii.*

And

And how is Mankind to be cured of his Infirmary at the Spirit of Prophecy? By being instructed, by the Spirit of Truth, who is to come at the Conclusion of the said thirty and eight mystical Years, *to arise and take up his bed and walk*, that is, to raise his Thoughts to the Contemplation of the divine Mysteries of the Law, and to lift up his Bed of the Letter, on which he has hitherto *rested*, into a sublime Sense, and then he will walk uprightly and steadily in the Faith, without wavering like a Paralytick.

And at what Season did Jesus come to this infirm Man? It was at a Feast of the Jews, *Irenæus, Chrysostom, Theophylact*, and *Cyril* call it the Feast of Pentecost. And the grand Feast of Pentecost is, as *St. Cyril (57)* says upon the Place, at the Perfection of Time, the Time of the Evangelical Sabbath, and of Jesus's spiritual Advent, which will be a Time of feasting on intellectual and divine Mysteries, of seeing Visions and of dreaming Dreams; consequently at that Time, as the ancient Jews and Fathers assert, Mankind will be cured of this Infirmary at the Spirit of Prophecy.

(57) Quod autem sub finem Hebdomadum Sanctæ Pentecostes ipse revertitur Hierosolymam, figuratè & ænigmatice significat futurum nostri Salvatoris Reversionem ultimis præsentis ævi temporibus. *In Loc. Johan.*

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And

And this too is the *certain Season*, that the Angel will descend and trouble the Waters. By Angel is here meant (58) the Spirit of Christ. And by Waters the Fathers understand, (59) the People of all Nations. But how will the Descent of the Spirit of Truth, like an Angel, trouble these Waters, that is, give any Molestation and Disturbance to the People? Is there not a Mistake in the Oracle? If the Clergy will be but greater Lovers of Truth than of their Interests; if they, who should be Teachers of Forbearance of one another in Love, will but keep their Temper, there would be found a mistake in it. But alas!

Lastly, The Jews, as is intimated, seem to have been mov'd with Indignation at the Cure of the infirm Man, saying to him, v. 10. *it is the Sabbath, it is not lawful for thee to carry thy Bed;* which literally could not be true. The Jews were not such precise Observers of the Sabbath; nor so stupid and foolish, as St. Cyril, (60) says, as to think the

(58) Turbat Angelus, — dicitur est Dominus magni consilii Angelus. *Augustin in Serm. cxv. Sect. 3.*

(59) Turbavit Aquam, id est, turbavit Populum. *Ejusdem in Psalmo.*

(60) Sabbatum est & Grabatum non licet tollere. *Quid stupidius aut inertius esse potest? In Loc. Johannis.*

taking up and carrying a Stool to be a Breach of it. But mystically, it is to be fear'd, this will be most true, and that the *Clergy*, who would be *Jews* inwardly, and the Circumcision in Spirit, will be bitter Enemies to Man's Exaltation of his Couch of the Letter of the Scriptures on or against the Evangelical Sabbath, and will make it, if possible, an *unlawful* Work; because it will bring to them Shame, Dishonour and Loss of Interests along with it.

After this Manner is every other Circumstance of this Story to be allegorically apply'd out of the Fathers. The Moral or Mystery of the whole, in short, is this, that at the Perfection of Time, signified by the *Sabbath*, the *Pentecost*, the End of *thirty eight Years*, the Spirit of Truth will descend on Mankind, to their Illumination in Prophecy, and to the healing of their *Errors*, call'd *Diseases*; which is admirably represented by the Parable before us, that according to the Letter has neither Reason nor common Sense in it.

And thus have I spoken to *eight* of the Miracles of *Jesus*; and whether I have not shew'd them, in Whole or Part, according to the Proposition before us, to
 consist

consist of Absurdities, Improbabilities, and Incredibilities; and whether they are not prophetic and parabolical Narratives of what will be mysteriously, and more wonderfully done by *Jesus*, I appeal to my *Readers*.

After another *Discourse* on some other Miracles, I intend to take into Examination the several Stories of *Jesus's* raising of the Dead as of *Lazarus*, *Jairus's* Daughter, and the Widow's Son of *Naim*; which reputedly are *Jesus's* grand Miracles; but, for all the seeming Greatness and Excellency of them, I don't doubt but to give the Letter of these Stories, a Toss out of the Creed of a considerate and wise Man; at least show their Insufficiency for the Purpose for which they have been hitherto apply'd. And if I should afterwards, by the Leave and Patience of the *Bishop of London*, give my Objection against *Christ's* Resurrection a Review, and some more Force, then what will become of the Argument of *Christ's* Power, Authority, and *Messiahship* from his Miracles?

But, besides *Jesus's* Miracles, I am, as Opportunity serves, to take into Consideration some of the Historical Parts of his Life; and shew them to be no less senseless, absurd and ridiculous than his Miracles.

And

And why may I not sometimes treat on the Parables of *Jesus*, and show what nonsensical and absurd Things they are, according to the Expositions of our most famous Commentators of these last Ages. *Jesus* was certainly the absolute, and most consummate Perfection of a *Cabalist*, a *Myrist*, a *Parabolist* or *Enigmatist*; but according to modern Commentaries and Paraphrases, he was the merest Idiot and Blockhead that ever open'd his Mouth, in that sort of Learning, to the Instruction of Mankind. And I am oblig'd a little to speak to the Absurdities of *Christ's* Doctrine and Parables, because one Article of the Prosecution against me was for saying, that any of the Philosophers of the Gentiles, or any rational Man (meaning according to modern Expositions) would make a better Teacher, than *Jesus* was.

What a great deal of Work have I upon my Hands, which, if God spare my Life and Health, I intend to go on with: If what I have already done in it be not acceptable to the Clergy, their Way to prevent the Prosecution of this great Undertaking, is to battle me upon what's past. Who knows but they may write, if they would try their Strength, so acutely in Defence of the Letter of *Jesus's* Miracles already discuss'd, as may effectually

ally stop my Mouth, and prevent my giving them any more Trouble of this Kind? And I suppose I have now gotten an Adversary in the *Bishop* of *St. David's*, who has already discharg'd one *Fool's Bolt* at me.

There has nothing been a more common Subject of Declamation among the *Clergy* than the *Reasonableness* of *Christianity*, which must be understood of the History of *Christ's* Life and Doctrine, or the Application of the Word *Reasonableness* to the *Christian Religion* is impertinent. But if I proceed, as I have begun in this Work, I shall shew *Christianity*, as it is understood, to be the most unreasonable and absurd Story, that ever was told; and our modern Systems of Theology groundless and senseless in almost every Part of them. *Mahometanism*, without Offence, be it spoken, is a more reasonable Religion than the *Christian*, upon modern Schemes and Systems.

If what I here say is offensive to our *Divines*, the *Press* is open for them as well as for myself, and they may, if they can, shew their Resentment of it. Thanks unto God and our most excellent Civil Government for such a Liberty of the *Press*: A Liberty that will lead and conduct us to the Fountain of Wisdom and Philosophy.

phy, which Restraint is a down-right Enemy to. And that this Blessing of Liberty may be continued (for all *Bishop Smalbrook* and *Dr. Roger's Hobbism*) is, I dare say, the Desire of the curious, inquisitive, and philosophical Part of Mankind. If this Liberty should be taken away, what a notable Figure will our *Divines* make from the *Press* and *Pulpit*, declaiming on the Reasonableness, Excellency and Perfection of the Christian Religion, without an Adversary; and telling their Congregations, that all, their bitterest and acutest Enemies can object, is clearly answered!

The *Press*, of late Years, has been productive of so many cogent and persuasive Arguments for Liberty of debate; and the Advocates for this Liberty, in the Judgment of the impartial and considerate, have so far gotten the better of their Adversaries, that I wonder any one can appear in behalf of Persecution. If I was a *Bishop* or *Doctor* in *Divinity*, I should think it a Disgrace to my Station and Education, to ask the Assistance of the Civil Authority to protect my Religion: I should judge my self unworthy of the Wages and Emoluments I enjoy'd, for the Preaching and Propagation of the Gospel, if I was unable to give an Answer to any one, that ask'd a Reason of my Faith:

Or if I was so Shallow-pated, as to think Heresy and Infidelity punishable by the Civil Magistrate, I should judge myself as much oblig'd to confute by *Reason*, as he is to punish by the *Sword*. If the *Bishop of London* had taken this Course with me; if he had publish'd a Refutation of my supposed Errors, as well as endeavour'd at a Prosecution of me for them, I had forgiven him the Wrongs and Injuries done me, and made no repeated Demands of Satisfaction for them.

Christianity is, as I believe, founded on a Rock of Wisdom; and what's more, has an omnipotent and omniscient God on its Side, who can incline the Hearts of Men to believe, and open the Eyes of their Understanding to discern the Truth of it; consequently there can be no Danger in the Attempts of our Adversaries, whether *Jews*, *Turks* or Domestick *Infidels*, against it. But Persecution implys Weakness and Impotency in God to defend his own Cause; or his Priests would not move for the Help of the Arm of Flesh in Vindication of it. And if, at this Time of Day, after so many Treatises of *Infidels*, and some of them as yet unanswered, against our Religion, this good Cause should be taken out of the Hands of God, and committed to the Care of the Civil

Civil Magistrate; if instead of Reason, the Clergy should have Recourse to Force, what will By-standers, and even Well-wishers to Christianity say? Nothing less than that *Infidels* had gotten the better of *Christ's* Ministers, and beaten them at their own Weapons of Reason and Argument.

The two great Pleaders for Persecution, to the Disgrace of themselves and Dishonour of our Religion, that have lately arose are Dr. Rogers and the *Bishop* of St. David's. Dr. Rogers's chief Reason against Liberty of Debate, is because, as he says, it is pernicious to the Peace and Welfare of the Community, by unsettling the Minds of the People about the Religion established: But here's no Consequence, unless it could be proved, that such as the great Mr. Grounds and Mr. Scheme, have it in their Hearts to raise Mobbs upon the Government, and to beat out the Brains of the Clergy. All the Harm, or rather Good, they aim at, is to exercise the Wits of the Clergy with their Doubts and Objections; and if the Passions of our *Ecclesiasticks* are not raised upon it, to the doing of Violence to these *Gentlemen*, the Peace of the Publick will never be disturb'd. As to myself, tho I have a vast and numerous Party on my Side,

Side, no less than all the Fathers and primitive Christians for some Ages; yet as we were peaceable and quiet Subjects of old, and passively obedient to the Emperors of Rome; so we will continue to the Civil Authority of this Nation. We only take the Liberty to awaken the Clergy out of a Lethargy of Dulness and Ignorance: and hope the Civil Magistrate will consider the Goodness and Charity of our Intentions, and guard us against their Insults for it.

The Bishop of St. David's (61) says, "It is absurd to assert, that the Liberties of any Nation will allow, with Impunity, a Set of distinguish'd Infidels to insult and treat with the greatest Contempt and Scorn the most sacred and important Truths, that are openly professed, by the whole Body of the People, of whatever Denomination." By a Set of Infidels, I suppose, he means me and the Fathers: And by *treating with Contempt and Scorn the most sacred and important Truths*, he means, our burlesquing, bantering and ridiculing the Clergy for their Ministry of the Letter: And for *this* he would, I conceive, have incensed the Societies for Reformation of Manners to a Prosecution of me. And if they had not

been wiser, and more merciful than their Preacher, I must have gone to Pot. But why should the *Bishop* dislike this way of Writing? Don't he know, that the Fathers of the Church used to jest and Scoff at the *Gentiles* and their Priests for their foolish Superstitions? Don't he know, that our *Reformers* banter'd and ridicul'd *Popery* out of Doors, and almost within the Memory of Man, it was reckon'd but a dull Sermon, that was not well humm'd for its Puns and Jest on the *Papists*? why then should the *Bishop* be against that way of writing, which was of good Use to the *Reformers*, and first *Christians*? The grand Subject for *Burlesque* and *Banter*, in my Opinion, is *Infidelity*; and that *Bishop*, who can't break two Jest upon *Infidels* for their one upon Christianity, has but a small Share of Wit. The Christian Religion according to the *Bishop*, will abide the *Test* of calm and sedate Reasoning against it, but can't bear a *Jest*; O strange!

But to leave these two Contenders for Persecution to the Chastisement of acuter Pens. What I have here pleaded for Liberty is not thro' any Fears of Danger to myself, but for the Love of Truth and Advancement of Christianity, which, without it, can't be defended, propagated and sincerely

sincerely embraced. And therefore I hope, that the Controversy before us, between *Infidels* and *Apostates* will be continued, by the Indulgence of the Government, till Truth arises and shines bright to the Dispersion of the Mists of Error and Ignorance, like the Light of the Sun to the Dispersion of the Darkness of the Night. I will, by God's Leave, go on to bear my part in the Controversy; And, if it was not more against the Interests than Reason of the *Clergy* to believe me, would again solemnly declare that what I do in it is with a View to the Honour of *Jesus*, our spiritual *Messiah*, to whom be Glory for ever *Amen.*

F I N I S.

But to leave these two Controversies for Persecution to the Chastisement of acuter Pens. What I have here pleaded for Liberty is not thro' any Fears of Danger to myself, but for the Love of Truth and Advancement of Christianity, which without it can't be defended, propagated and sincerely